1: Butt E-4 (no date) 1952 FL11 Luo FL11

RAIN-MAKING

Little information is available on the processes of rain-making among the Luo. Roscoe states that it is an important ceremony and is performed by a *musoga* priests who lives among the people for this purpose.(1) According to Northcote, the rain-maker is greatly esteemed, and his homestead is usually found near a big tree which is considered sacred. When rain is wanted, he gathers some herbs, puts them in a large pot of water and boils them under the tree. He draws off a little into another pot and, sucking it up through a reed, squirts it into the air, after first blowing through the reed and making the pot bubble.(2) Evans-Pritchard mentions that the Luo rain-maker is called the *won koth* and that sometimes his functions are combined with those of the *jabilo*. Rain-makers among the neighbouring Bantu seem to have a higher reputation than Luo *jakoth* and are often consulted. 789

WITCHCRAFT

Sickness is thought to be due either to the malevolence of a ghost or, more frequently, to magic worked by some envious person who wishes to bring misfortune on his victim.(3) In either case the aid of a witchdoctor is sought and he, by means of various incantations, discovers the cause and the culprit. A sorcerer may cause death by spearing the shadow of his victim, by working spells, by hiding certain objects near the house which bring sickness to the inmates. If a ghost is causing trouble the witch-doctor prescribes offerings and sacrifices necessary for appeasement. He also discovers thieves, conducts ordeals and divines the causes of events. He makes counter-magic to defend people against the activities of sorcerers and is the general prescriber of all cures. Johnston mentions a 'deeper magic' (*jamkingo*) which, among the Gesi tribe is practised by the blacksmiths.(4) 753 756 [754]

LIFE CYCLE

BIRTH

After the birth of a boy the mother stays inside the house for four days; for a girl, she stays inside for three days. The father of the child does not eat or sleep in the hut until the child begins to cut its teeth. 846

Twins are considered lucky; their arrival is attended by many ceremonies and by propitiatory dances. 845

PUBERTY

Until marriage, girls help their mothers in the fields and assist them in cooking and carrying. Boys help in herding the animals. At puberty both boys and girls have their front lower teeth extracted and for four days they remain in their homes. After this period they go about visiting [857] 881 304

(1) Roscoe, *The Northern Bantu*, 1915, p.292.
(2) Northcote, *J.R.A.I.*, 1907, p.64. (3) *Ibid.*
(4) *The Uganda Protectorate*, Vol.II, 1902.

4: Hobley G-5 (ca. 1900) 1902 FL11 Luo FL11

766 worn is black. Others smear themselves with white earth. Relations in the village shave their heads three days after a death. The eldest son of the deceased sits on a stool in the road outside the village and his head is shaved by an old woman. For three days after the death of anyone of importance the villagers do not cultivate.

766 [724] If a big chief dies all the surrounding people collect at the village; even if a neighbouring clan is at war hostilities are suspended, and they attend the funeral rites of their late enemy. In the case of the death of a chief a new hut is built and the deceased is buried inside in a sitting posture; the grave is dug by a brother of the deceased. A new ox hide is placed at the bottom of the grave, and the head of the corpse is covered with a water pot. Seeds of every kind of grain grown are put into the grave; sweet potatoes are excluded. The people dance and drink *tembo* for ten days and many oxen are slaughtered. The men wail for ten days, but the women wail every morning for about a year. No one cultivates the fields for ten days.

844 846 *Birth customs.*—On the occasion of a birth, if it is a boy it is kept inside the house for four days, if it is a girl for three days. When a birth takes place the female neighbours attend, and a goat is killed for the mother and the other women. No man is allowed in the hut until three or four days have elapsed. The father of the child does not eat or sleep again in the hut until the child begins to cut its teeth. The mother does not go to cultivate for about nine days after the birth.

844 608 [304] [553] If a woman has had two children and they have both died, she will upon the birth of the third child take it out of the village on a basket-work tray and place it in the road; an old woman who has had a hint of this will go and pick it up and take it to her house, then the father of the child goes and buys it back for a goat: having recovered it the father bores the lobe of its right ear and inserts a small earring of brass wire. If the child is a boy it is henceforward called Owiti and if a girl it is called Awiti, meaning the child that has been thrown away. The old woman who picked up the child is afterwards called mother in addition to the real mother.

845 [553] [535] Twins are considered lucky, but the infants and their parents have to stay in seclusion in their hut for a whole month. Women neighbours may enter the hut but men may not. The twin born first is called Apio (the one who comes quickly). The twin born second is called Adongo (the one who is delayed). The birth of twins is signalised by dances which extend over a whole month; they are apparently of a somewhat obscene character.

582 583 *Marriage customs.*—Girls are espoused at the [illegible]ven, and they often go to their husband's house at the age of ten or eleven. The suitor commences by making small payments to the father of the girl every month or two. When the man has paid say one cow and twenty sheep he takes the girl to his house.

585 The unmarried girls of the village take the bride to her husband's house. The father of the girl kills an ox and takes the meat and a quantity of *wimo* porridge to the man's village by way of providing a wedding feast. If the man's

10: Roscoe M-5 (ca. 1900)1915
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When A MAN MARRIES

591 a second or third wife, he may select another place for his new wife, either in the village near his former wife, or he may elect to take her to some other village. A man who has wives dwelling in different places lives with them in turn. Married
586 women are careful in regard to their relations with men. Should a woman be lax in her behaviour or encourage men to visit her, her husband will send her back to her parents and divorce her.

842 595 A wife who is proved to be sterile is not divorced, but her parents send her sister to become the man's wife, and he is expected to pay another sum as a marriage-fee for her; but there is no stated time when the sum shall be paid after the woman goes to live with him. The former wife continues to live with him as his wife.

291 **Distinctive dress of married women.** Each woman after marriage makes a girdle with a long fringe at the back and ties the ends together, which gives it the appearance of a tail. The girdle is worn constantly during the husband's life-time,
[765] but, should he die, she takes it off and puts it on the house-roof over the door during the season of mourning to show that she is a widow and is mourning. After marriage a wife scarifies
304 her sides and back in addition to the scarifications she made at puberty. When a woman has a son born, she makes a
352 clay-mound in the middle of the floor in her house for the
852 food pot to rest on when the family are at meals.

844 **Birth customs.** A wife who expects her confinement calls in an elderly woman to act as midwife. This woman is a person who has had experience in such matters and is herself a mother. When the child is born, the midwife cuts the umbilical cord on an axe handle if the child is a boy, and on a hoe handle if it is a girl. The placenta of a boy is buried outside on the right side of the doorway and that of a girl on the left side.
● 846 During the first three days the father remains near the house in which his wife and child lie, but the midwife alone enters and attends to the wants of the mother and child. On the third day the father takes a fowl and rubs it on the child's chest and turns it loose, when it becomes the property of the child. When the new moon appears, the parents bathe, and

10: Roscoe M-5 (ca. 1900)1915
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shave their heads, taking care to keep separate the hair which is cut off. This hair is hidden away in some place near, by preference in a rat-hole or in some hole where it is not likely to be found again. 846

Birth of twins. At the birth of twins the parents remain together in one house for ten days, and the midwife waits on them. When this time of seclusion ends, a small pot of blood is drawn from the neck of an ox, cooked and given to the parents to eat. After the meal they are escorted to the river, washed, and their heads shaved. Their house is then swept and the floor smeared with cow-dung, and friends come and dance in the village and drink beer. The mother takes the twins a round of visits which lasts several days, but she returns home each night to sleep. At each house she visits the people give her presents of grain. When the visits have been made the mother brews beer with the grain she has received in presents, and her friends again gather to dance and to drink the beer. 845 [431]

Initiation ceremonies. Children live in the same village with their parents and under their control. Until marriage they lead a free and happy life, with few wants and cares. The boys assist in herding cattle, and the girls help their mothers in their fields and also carry wood and water and assist in cooking. Their duties are light and there is no force beyond argument used to make them work. Children imitate their elders in seeking ornaments to wear and in smearing their bodies with oil and red or white paint. When they come to the age of puberty, their four front teeth in the lower jaw are extracted and they are initiated in the customs of the clan. For four days they remain in the house, after which they go about visiting their friends and receive presents of fowls. Girls go through the same ceremony as boys in having their teeth extracted, but, in addition, their bodies are scarified on the sides and back. Should there be excessive haemorrhage when teeth are extracted, the parents send to the man who has the bracelets of the deceased person after whom the boy is named and borrow them, and the youth wears them until the bleeding ceases. When the ceremony of extracting the teeth is over, the boys are sent to live in the boys' quarters 857 [302] 881 304 [431] [752] 882

11: Hartmann M-5 (ca. 1920)1928 FL11 Luo FL11

844 couple of women who have come to assist her, support her shoulders. If the woman is afraid or weak, somebody generally a strong woman is called to *thulge* her, i. e. she puts her mouth close on the mouth of the patient, and blows her breath down the patient's lungs in order to increase the pressure.

No sooner the child is born or one of the assisting women run out of the hut to pull out of the roof a piece of kaffircorn stalk, which is split leaving a sharp edge. This is used to cut the babe's navel after it has been tied off.

[301] If the babe is a boy the Kaffircorn stalk is pulled out of the roof at the side of the fire place of the hut *(Kor emach* — lefthand side facing the hut). If it is a girl, the stalk is pulled out *Kor athong* — the right hand side. Compare: Burial of children (p. 274).

When the afterbirth has come out the mother takes the child on her lap, whilst somebody runs for a drop of fresh sheepmilk — otherwise never consumed — which the child has to drink. Not until the child has swallowed a drop of this will the mother give the child suck.

● 846 Immediately after the birth of the child the husband orders a goat to be killed for the mother, and the pot is put to boil, for the mother has a ravenous appetite. Now word is sent to her father, who will kill a goat for his wife, who comes to see her daughter, bringing some of the meat and fish along.

For no purpose except nature's call is the mother to leave the hut within 4 days, if the babe is a boy. Then she takes the child outside, and a little patch of hair is shaven above the ears of father, mother and child.

852 After 10 days a bull and a heifer are bled, meat and fish is cooked, simsim is pounded and mixed with rendered butter, and the lot of it is to provide a good feed for the inhabitants of the kraal later in the day. On that day the heads of father, mother and child are shaven clean. Then after the woman is smeared [824] with butter and sprinkled with simsim seeds, anklets of a wild plant *(ochok)* are strung on plaited grass *(ogunga)* and creeping grass *(mudhuro)* and [301] hung crosswise over the shoulders and under the armpits of the young mother. In the same way she is ornamented with cowrysshells, ordinary beads, beads of semilircular pieces of ostrich eggs *(rok)* and big iron beads.

When the woman is thus ornamented, a boy, her brother-in-law, is called [545] to hold the child. Now an old woman brings *ewinjo (ma mumbul, simsim, mixed* with rendered butter) and cooked *wimbi*. She kneads a mouthful of the food, making with her thumb a little pit in it *(athuonyo shungu)* which she fills with *ewinjo*, then she puts it on the end of a wooden ladle, used in stirring the food, 4 times to the mouth of the mother. The 5th time she puts it with the help of the ladle in the mother's mouth, who is not allowed to touch the food with her hand. After she has eaten this one mouthful, another mouthful is given in the same way to her young brother-in-law who holds the child.

Then meat, fish, blood and other food is brought for the inhabitants of the kraal. That night the father and mother of the child sleep again together for the first time after the birth of the child *(chgolo undo nyathi)*.

If the babe is a girl the woman stays in the hut for 3 days, after which the child is taken outside and a little patch of hair is shaven also above

11: Hartmann M-5 (ca. 1920) 1928 FL11 Luo FL11

the ear of father, mother and child. But 10 days later, on the day of the feast, the father's head is only shaven above the ear again. Those of mother and child, however, are shaven clear *(bwanyo wich)*. The feast is prepared much like for a babe-boy, but there is no *awinja*, and the performance with the ladle does not take place. Neither is the woman ornamented like after the birth of a boy; because the girl later on will not belong to that part of the country; she will be married out and live and die elsewhere.

If the husband has more wives, he is not entitled to conjugal rights with any of them until after the birth of a child the feast has taken place, and he has slept again with the mother of the child. If he would brake this rule, the newborn babe would waste away and die *(omiyo nyathi chira)*.

Adultery is reckoned a serious offence by both husband and wife. If the woman knows that her husband is misbehaving in this way, she will refuse cohabitation, for if she is with a child cohabitations would result in a miscarriage. If a woman commits adultery her husband may send her away, and claim the dowry he has paid for her. However, if she brings forth a child born from adultery he will reckon the child to be his own, as the woman is his, nobody else's for he has properly married her.

A widow is given in marriage to the full brother or the nearest relation of her deceased husband. If she goes to his full brother, or in case he had none, to his nearest relation, and if she begets children by him, then these children will be reckoned to be the children of her new husband. In case her deceased husband has a full brother but she does not like him, or he is still too young to take her as his wife, some other near relative will take the widow. But the children born by them will be called the children of the deceased husband. The present husband is only a borrowed one. Hence, when the girls born to them grow up and get married, the real brother of deceased husband will receive the full dowry paid for them minus one cow for each girl, which cow goes to the real father of the girl for bringing her up.

When the boys born by them grow up and get married they will leave the kraal and build their own apart, unless their real father helps them to get married by paying the dowry.

If a woman has given birth to twins, both she and her husband are not allowed to leave the hut at all for 20 days; not even for nature's call. A hole is dug in the floor of the hut, and an old bottomless cooking pot is put over it, and this is used as a W. C. During those 20 days new beer is brewn. When the time has elapsed and the beer is ready, a bull is killed and its hide is dried for the parents of the twins to sleep on. For on that day some old woman will take away the old hide, which they used for that purpose. The relations of the woman also kill a bull and brew beer, which they bring along to the village where the twins are born. After their arrival the father and the mother with the twins sit down near the entrance of the kraal, together with an old woman who beats a drum. The visitors from the woman's home, the people of the kraal and of all the neighbourhood in turn go up to the mother of the twins, who has got some white clay *(rongo or migosi)* mixed with water in a small vessel. She dips her finger in it and

14: Johnston G-4, 5 (no date) 1904 FL11 Luo FL11

754 in order to kill him. If a person is thought to be bewitched, the medicine
[683] man concerned is caught and forced to remove the spell, afterwards being punished by a fine. This kind of witchcraft, however, is not thought to be very serious. There is a deeper magic called "jamkingo." Amongst the Gemi tribe this is practised by the blacksmiths. It is of the nature of a secret society, and no doubt means secret poisoning. They have a
695 form of *ordeal* called "kiviri." A small pot of water is placed on the fire. A little "wimbi" flour and a bit of "medicine" are put into the water. If the water boils over, the man is guilty; if not, he is innocent. Another ordeal is as follows: A gourd basin with a large hole cut in the bottom is placed on a flat stone. Water is then poured into the calabash, the bottom of which being, of course, not close-fitting to the stone, would permit ordinarily of a leakage. But the medicine man who attends puts into the bottom of the calabash crushed-up leaves of a kind of mimosa which, for a time at least, stop the leakage and enable the calabash to be filled up with water, the retention of the water by the calabash proving the man to be innocent. Another ordeal is arranged in this way: Dry flour is given to the suspected person. If innocent, he can swallow it; if he is unable to moisten the flour with his saliva and swallow it, he is shown to be guilty.

787 As regards *omens*: If a bird sings on the left-hand side as a man
777 is starting on a journey, the journey, if for war, will be unlucky; but if it be merely a peaceful visit, it will be a fortunate one. If the bird sings on the right-hand side, it is a good omen for war, but a bad one for an ordinary visit. If a cat crosses the road from right to left, it is a good omen; if from left to right, bad. If a rat is seen on the road, and it runs along the road ahead of the man, it is a good omen; but if it crosses the road from one side to the other, it is an unlucky sign. If on a journey a man strikes the little toe of either foot, it is a very bad sign; if he strikes the big toe, it is propitious. If the eldest child of a man is a boy, and the man sets out to travel, it will be an unlucky sign if the first person he meets is also a man. On the other hand, if his eldest child is a girl, and he meets a woman when he starts on a journey, that is likewise a bad sign. They profess to be able to foretell events by
787 *divining*, and the divination is exercised on the entrails of an ox or sheep. They are a good deal given to prophesying. The chief Odua when quite a lad prophesied the coming of the white man, and this at a time when no white man had entered the country. They believe in rain-makers.

846 On the occasion of a *birth* the infant, if a boy, is kept inside the house
[844] for four days; if a girl, for three days. When a birth takes place, the female neighbours attend, and a goat is killed for the mother and the other women. No man is allowed in the hut until three or four days have elapsed. The father of the child does not eat or sleep again in the

14: Johnston G-4, 5 (no date) 1904 FL11 Luo FL11

hut until the child begins to cut its teeth. The mother does not go out to cultivate for nine days after the birth. If a woman has had two children previously who have died, she follows the same ceremony as that described among the Bantu Kavirondo. When the child has been brought back by an old woman, it is redeemed by the father, who then bores the lobe of the right ear and inserts an ear-ring of brass wire. The child is thenceforth called "Owiti," if a boy; if a girl, "Awiti," meaning "the child that has been thrown away." The old woman who picks up the child is regarded as its foster-mother. Twins are considered lucky, though their arrival is attended by a good many ceremonies and by propitiatory dances which are of an obscene nature.

437. A MEDICINE MAN FROM NYAKACH, SOUTH SIDE OF KAVIRONDO BAY

When a person *dies*, the corpse is immediately taken out of the house. If it be a woman, her brothers-in-law dig the grave in the verandah of the house. The corpse is *buried* on its left side with the hand under the head. In the case of a woman's death, her relatives and friends come and wail. Her husband presents each clan that attends with a goat. The mourners stay for three days. The hut in which a person has died is used for a month. The neighbours then meet together and drink beer, and the house is broken down. Upon the death of a man his brother digs his grave, and he is buried in the house of his first wife, if she is still living. If she is dead, he is buried in the verandah of his own house. Men only wail for one day. After that only the women wail, at first for three days, and then at dawn for fifteen days.

As a sign of *mourning* the women wear a string of banana fibre round the forehead. They also wear a black tail fringed with white strings for about a month. Others smear themselves with white earth. Relatives of

20:Ominde I-5 (ca. 1948) 1952
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deliver. A person standing behind an expectant mother may also be driven away in the fear that if that person's birth had been difficult the birth of the coming child would be equally difficult. Social regulations connected with greetings are found among the pagans and these may result from the instruction of a medicine man. Thus he may prescribe the length of time in which an expectant mother is not allowed to greet those whom she happens to meet on the road.

Although in the family circle a woman is not allowed to overwork during this period, conditions are such that, if left to themselves, they continue with very strenuous work until the time of birth. In the past, expectant mothers stored food which they ate after giving birth. These foodstuffs might be dried meat, dried fish, ghee, and corn for gruel. Nowadays the availability of fresh meat has made it possible to supply women with sufficient food even although it is very expensive.

The amount of rest given to an expectant mother depends on the husband's position in society. With the poorer families, hard work continues till the time of birth. Thus, at one time a woman called Andege took some ripe bananas to Kisumu in the morning, returned at about 2 p.m., and at 4 p.m. gave birth to her daughter, Rapuoda.

Guessing the child's sex. In guessing at the child's sex before birth, the mothers generally rely on past experience. It is recognized to be very difficult, and even impossible, to predict the sex of the first child. Certain guesses depend on the health of the mother, though such guesses are not made public. For a male child it is believed that the mother should be thin; with a female child, the reverse, and these views are probably based on the assumption that male children sap their mother's energy to a greater degree. This is likewise the basis of

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843 [846] the custom which confines a female child in the hut with its mother for only three days, whereas a male child would stay with its mother for four days, thus giving her a longer rest. In reality, only those women who have given birth to two or more children seem to be able to make any successful guess as to the sex of their expected child.

The Birth of a Child

844 177 *Preparations.* Among the Christian women, customs connected with the preparation for a birth have largely been dropped; but superstition is still a very real factor in the life of every Luo woman. Hence, for example, the preparation of bedding and clothes before a birth is usually neglected on purpose, the position being even worse in families of low income. When women give birth in the maternity wards, the husbands therefore have to make a hasty preparation during the seven days spent by their wives in hospital.

843 177 [302] Among the pagans, the pain or nausea experienced during the first few months of foetal growth is mitigated by the administration of a certain medicine. When this trouble has ceased the woman is expected to grow long hair which should not be shaved until the child is born. Those pagan women who associate much with Christians, however, have abolished this custom of growing hair, though some of them still take the medicine. Among the pagans, the expectant mother takes a light purgative during the sixth month which is believed to free her from any abdominal impurity. Strong purgatives are forbidden in case they may cause abortion or premature birth.

844 *Assistance during delivery.* The assistance a woman receives when giving birth depends on the circumstances in which she finds herself. There is no ruling laid down

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cry of the midwives was heard announcing the birth of twins, the news had to be carried to the parents of the woman. This loud cry was intended to scare the evil spirits which had brought about the double birth. With it began a series of taboos on the couple as well as on the twins, the family being virtually isolated from society. For emptying their bowels a large pot was placed in a hidden corner at the back of the house. If either of the twins died during the early period it was thrown into this pot. In place of the usual clothing, the couple had creepers twined around them. The period of taboo closed with a large gathering at which a great deal of beer was drunk. At this final ceremony the dancing was rather obscene and was accompanied by foul language in reference to the couple. These proceedings lifted the taboo from the shoulders of the parents, but the twins continued to be affected until their deaths. Moreover, anything done to one of the twins had to be done to the other also, because they could not be treated as separate identities. Now the attitude has greatly changed and even among pagans these customs are no longer observed. 845 [177]

Similarly, a birth in which the baby's legs appeared first was dreaded. This was ascribed to the work of the evil spirit.

Renewal of marital relationship. Originally it was the custom for the renewal of a marital relationship to take place on the third day following the birth of a female child, and on the fourth day after a male child. No married relatives were allowed to enter the hut to see the baby before the parents of the child renewed their marital relationship. 846 834

Although none of my informants could testify that this practice still exists, it is possible that it persists in certain places. Some of the informants pointed out that [177]

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846 834 177 modern maternity wards have weakened the custom, since women stay in them for seven days and return home after having shown the baby to many of their friends.

751 854 754 854 753 *Protection against witches.* Although Christian mothers are not affected by this kind of superstition, pagan mothers still tie things around the necks of their babies to protect them from malignant glances, these articles being attached when the children are exposed to the view of relatives and friends. Most people believe that babies can be bewitched as soon as their skin begins to darken, and the pagans believe that through magic an ill-disposed person can introduce a worm into the baby's stomach. If this occurs, the baby cries and vomits whenever it is suckled by its mother. In the past when no clothes were worn, it was believed that the mother's breast could also be bewitched. The tradition was that every living person had a beneficial worm in the stomach, and that this worm digested the food eaten. When the worm refused to digest the food, there would be serious stomach trouble which might prove fatal. When a child was bewitched it was believed that its beneficial worm had been replaced by a harmful one.

751 [177] Protection against this harmful worm could supposedly be gained by scratching the body of the child (the forehead, the palm, or the flat of the foot) with some medicine, and it is still said that, if the medicine is sufficiently strong, any evil-eyed man looking at the child with the intention of bewitching it will lose his eyesight. Some fragments of bones or roots of herbs may also be worn for the same purpose. Many of these customs have disappeared in strongly Christianized areas, the Christians themselves having sometimes taken direct action to stamp them out, but nurses are still warned not to let young children play on the roadside, in order to protect their charges from being bewitched.

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Childless marriages. Failure to have a child is a great disaster in the home. The idea of the perpetuation of their kind is so deeply rooted in the minds of the Luo people that a childless marriage generally culminates in the breaking up of the home concerned, the husband usually being advised by his relatives to marry a second wife. Although results may prove that it is the husband who is defective, priority is always given to men to prove their fecundity. Thus a woman is forbidden by the social conventions to attempt to prove on her own initiative that she can give birth to children.

If through the second marriage the husband is proved to be sterile, his wives may one by one desert him. On the other hand, this great desire for children may lead him to carry on his name through the secret offices of the woman's brothers-in-law. Otherwise he must face the inevitable fate of having his family broken up.

Women's diet after birth. For the first week after childbirth, the mother's food is limited to gruel, fish, and green vegetables. 'Bo', which is one of the vegetable pulses, is excluded on account of the trouble it gives to the stomach. During this early period meat is not eaten because most women complain that it makes the stomach tight. Hard food, such as boiled maize, is also avoided at this time. Although tea and coffee are occasionally drunk by the more fortunate families, the drink which pleases women most at this time is gruel. They are allowed to take a lot of it as people believe that it helps in the formation of the milk which is so important for feeding the new baby.

The period of this considered treatment is brief, lasting for about a month at the most. Much depends on the economic resources of the family concerned, and the poorer the family is, the shorter is the time that careful attention can be given.